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TAGS. PGOV, OINT, PDEV, UK

SUBJECT: DEVOLUTION: GOVERNMENT MOTION ON WHITE PAPER

APPROVED

REF: LONDON 623

SUMMARY - FOUR-DAY DEBATE ON DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER CON-
CLUDED JANUARY 19 WITH COMMONS VOTING BY LARGE MARGIN TO
"TAKE NOTE" OF GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS. TWO OPPOSITION
MOTIONS -- ONE FROM CONSERVATIVES AND OTHER FROM NATIONA-
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LISTS -- WERE REJECTED HANDILY. MARGIN OF FINAL VOTE,

HOWEVER, OBSCURED VERY DIFFICULT TASK GOVERNMENT WILL FACE IN ENACTING DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION. END SUMMARY.

1. FIRST FOUR DAYS OF TWENTY-THREE DAYS SET ASIDE TO DEBATE DEVOLUTION IN CURRENT PARLIAMENT CONCLUDED JANUARY 19 WHEN COMMONS VOTED 295 TO 37 TO APPROVE GOVERNMENT MOTION TO "TAKE NOTE" OF WHITE PAPER (GOVERNMENT MAJORITY 258). TWO AMENDMENTS TO MAIN MOTION, THE FIRST BY CONSERVATIVES REJECTING GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION PROPOSALS, AND THE SECOND, JOINTLY SPONSORED BY SCOTTISH AND WELSH NATIONALISTS, CALLING FOR DEVOLUTION OF GREATER ECONOMIC POWER, WERE REJECTED BY SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITIES -- 315 TO 244 AND 304 TO 27, RESPECTIVELY.

2. OUTCOME OF VOTE ON MAIN MOTION HINGED ON CONSERVATIVES' POSTURE. TORY LEADERSHIP, SHORTLY BEFORE ACTUAL VOTE, DECIDED NOT TO OPPOSE "TAKE NOTE" MOTION, THUS ASSURING ITS PASSAGE. WHILE BULK OF TORY MPS ABSTAINED, VOTE WAS FORCED BY CONSERVATIVE ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS. SEVERAL SCOTTISH TORIES JOINED GOVERNMENT. FOURTEEN TORIES HAD EARLIER OPPOSED OFFICIAL CONSERVATIVE AMENDMENT AND VOTED WITH GOVERNMENT. PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP) WAS AT LEAST AS BADLY DIVIDED AS TORIES, IF BETTER LED. TWENTY LABOR MPS ABSTAINED ON MAIN MOTION, WITH THREE OTHERS OPPOSING IT OUTRIGHT. ANOTHER THREE LABOR MPS (SCOTTISH LABOR PARTY DISSIDENTS SILLARS AND ROBERTSON AND DAVID LAMBIE) VOTED FOR NATIONALIST AMENDMENT, RETURNING TO LABOR FOLD ONLY ON MAIN MOTION. NATIONALISTS JOINED GOVERNMENT ON FINAL VOTE, AS DID LIBERALS.

3. CLOSING DEBATE WAS MARKED BY FREQUENT LABOR BACKBENCH "CLARIFICATIONS" THAT SUPPORT OF "TAKE NOTE" MOTION DID NOT IMPLY APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS (A POSITION EARLIER AFFIRMED BY CHIEF GOVERNMENT WHIP BOB MELLISH IN PLP MEETING), A POWERFUL INTERVENTION BY FORMER TORY LEADER EDWARD HEATH WHO ARGUED THAT COMMONS' FAILURE TO AGREE ON RELATIVELY GENEROUS DEVOLUTION FORMULA WOULD ENSURE BREAK-UP OF UK, AND TOUGH STATEMENT BY SCOTTISH SECRETARY WILLIAM ROSS.

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4. COMMENT: WHILE VOTE WAS OVERWHELMINGLY IN SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT'S INNOCUOUS MOTION, IT CANNOT BE INTERPRETED AS ENDORSEMENT OF WHITE PAPER PROPOSALS. INDEED, GOVERNMENT STRETCHED PARTY LOYALTY TO LIMIT IN GAINING THIS OUTCOME, AND ITS SUCCESS WAS ONLY ASSURED BY CONSERVATIVE RELUCTANCE TO RISK DEFEAT OF GOVERNMENT. IN MANY RESPECTS CONSERVATIVE DECISION WAS MOST IMPORTANT

DEVELOPMENT APISING FROM ACTUAL VOTE, AS IT AGAIN IL-
LUSTRATED CONSERVATIVE UNWILLINGNESS TO CONFRONT LABOR
AND RISK ELECTIONS, DESPITE LEADER THATCHER'S PUBLIC
THREAT TO FORCE ELECTIONS DURING CURRENT PARLIAMENT. AS
WE REPORTED EARLIER (REFTEL), GOVERNMENT IS IN VERY SE-
RIOUS TROUBLE ON DEVOLUTION. AND HAS LITTLE APPARENT
ROOM TO MANEUVER.

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